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Letter dated 25 July 2014 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Latvia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the candidature of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the term 2015-2017 in the elections to be held in November 2014 during the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, please find attached a document containing the voluntary pledges and commitments of the Republic of Latvia in the field of human rights (see annex).

It would be highly appreciated if the present letter and its annex were to be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 113 (c) of the provisional agenda of the sixty-ninth session of the Assembly.

(*Signed*) Agnese **Vilde**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia
to the United Nations
New York

* A/69/150.

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Annex to the letter dated 25 July 2014 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Latvia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Candidature of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations Human Rights Council 2015-2017

Voluntary pledges and commitments submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. The Republic of Latvia has the honour to present its candidature for election to the Human Rights Council for the period from 2015 to 2017.

2. The promotion and protection of human rights has been one of Latvia's main priorities since regaining independence in 1991. This is reflected in its national policies, both foreign and domestic. Twenty-two years after the restoration of independence, Latvia has developed modern, comprehensive legislation and an institutional system for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Constitution provides that human rights are realized without discrimination of any kind. It has been ensured that civil society participates in the decision-making process at all levels.

3. Latvia acknowledges the unique role played by the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world. Consistently enhanced international cooperation and policies that demonstrate an understanding of development, peace, security and human rights as being interlinked and mutually reinforcing are essential prerequisites for the achievement of these goals.

4. Latvia has acceded to over 50 international human rights instruments, including the core United Nations human rights treaties and their optional protocols. Latvia fully implements its obligations arising from these instruments, regularly submits national reports to the monitoring mechanisms and thoroughly follows up on their recommendations.

5. Latvia collaborates closely with various United Nations bodies and mechanisms. Latvia actively took part in the establishment of the Human Rights Council and has fully supported its endeavours ever since. Latvia has been an active member of the Commission on Human Rights (1999-2001), the Economic and Social Council (2011-2013) and the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (since 2013).

6. In order to fully support the mission and functioning of United Nations bodies, Latvia has regularly made voluntary contributions to the operations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including in 2013. In addition, Latvia contributed to the budget of UN-Women in 2013.

7. In 2001, Latvia became one of the first States to issue a standing invitation to all the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. Since then special

procedures mandate holders have visited Latvia five times.[a] We give our full support to their mandates and believe that independence in the performance of their tasks is a precondition for their effectiveness. In 2007, Latvia started an initiative to promote the extension of a standing invitation to all the special procedures of the Council. We note that since then the number of countries that have extended a standing invitation has grown from 57 to 106.

8. Latvia attaches great importance to the effective functioning of the universal periodic review process. Latvia's human rights record was reviewed under the universal periodic review mechanism on 5 May 2011 and we are working diligently on the implementation of the recommendations received.

9. Following the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, Latvia was one of the first countries in the region to establish a national human rights institution. The Latvian National Human Rights Office was founded in 1995 in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions (Paris Principles) as a State institution with a mandate to raise awareness and promote the observance of human rights. In 2007, using the institutional basis of the National Human Rights Office, the Ombudsman's Office was established, strengthening the institution's independence and expanding its competence.

10. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, Latvia announces the following voluntary pledges and commitments.

At the international level

11. With a view to a strong and effective Human Rights Council, Latvia will:

(a) Actively engage in the work of the Human Rights Council in order to continue to promote the universality and indivisibility of human rights;

(b) Work to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights — civil, political, economic, social and cultural — for all persons, without distinction;

(c) Contribute to the full implementation of the mandate of the Human Rights Council, including by strengthening its capacity to address human rights violations whenever they occur. Latvia is firmly committed to a credible, dynamic and effective Human Rights Council working in a spirit of genuine partnership, ensuring cross-regional cooperation and promoting open and constructive dialogue among States.

12. To promote human rights in the United Nations system, Latvia will:

(a) Continue to support the ongoing efforts to strengthen and optimize the functioning of the treaty body system and work to ensure that the treaty body strengthening process is implemented in a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent manner;

[a] The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (in 2004); the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (in 2007); the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (in 2008); and the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights (in 2012). In addition, the Special Rapporteur on the situation in Belarus visited the Baltic countries, including Latvia in 2005, because the Government of Belarus denied access to the country.

(b) Continue to cooperate with the mechanisms of the Human Rights Council and maintain its support for the important work of treaty bodies and OHCHR. Latvia will also continue to actively engage in the work of the Third Committee of the General Assembly;

(c) Ensure continuous voluntary contributions to OHCHR and UNHCR;

(d) Uphold the standing invitation to all special procedures and cooperate with the respective mandate holders, as well as continue to promote the issuance of standing invitations at the Human Rights Council and the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review;

(e) Continue to engage actively in the universal periodic review process through constructive participation in interactive dialogues and work towards ensuring an efficient second cycle of the review;

(f) Work to ensure effective follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals and actively engage in the post-2015 process, with particular emphasis on mainstreaming human rights in all aspects of United Nations policies and programmes.

13. With respect to the priority areas for the advancement of human rights, Latvia will:

(a) Pursue an active role in the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality at the international level. As a member of the Executive Board of UN-Women, Latvia will contribute to the joint efforts to increase women's leadership and participation, end violence against women and engage women in all aspects of peace and security processes. Latvia is committed to further increasing women's political and economic participation at both the national and international levels. In order to accomplish this goal Latvia joined the Equal Futures Partnership to Expand Women's Political and Economic Participation in 2013;

(b) Support and strengthen the role of the Human Rights Council in safeguarding human rights in the context of the use of new information and communications technologies and continue to decisively dedicate efforts to ensure that the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms are also applied in cyberspace. Latvia will pursue this goal in close cooperation with the member States of the Freedom Online Coalition[b] and other partners. Latvia will keep the issues related to development of the information society and the use new technologies high on the agenda during its European Union Presidency in 2015;

(c) Continue to support democratization processes in countries in transition by providing expertise and technical assistance in the field of reform of the justice sector and by strengthening the rule of law through development cooperation programmes.

14. Concerning regional engagement, Latvia will contribute to the strengthening of democracy, good governance, rule of law and overall respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms through regional cooperation. Latvia will also facilitate

[b] The Freedom Online Coalition is a cross-regional group of 21 Governments that collaborate to advance Internet freedom worldwide. It was formed at a conference hosted by the Netherlands in 2011 and Latvia has been a member since 2012.

cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, including the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

At the national level

15. At the national level, Latvia will:

(a) Continue to consider further ratifications of human rights instruments and examine the possibility of accepting the right to individual complaint under previously ratified treaties;

(b) Prepare and submit a national report on human rights in Latvia, which will be reviewed during the second cycle of the universal periodic review process in 2016;

(c) Strengthen ongoing efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights at the national level and, inter alia, to develop new national guidelines and an action plan on gender equality;

(d) Continue to implement the activities aimed at improving women's health care, including reproductive and maternal health care;

(e) Intensify efforts to fight against human trafficking and sham marriages, focusing in particular on capacity-building of law enforcement agencies and implementation of public awareness-raising activities;

(f) Implement measures to ensure protection of the rights of the child in accordance with United Nations guidelines on the prevention of juvenile crime and the protection of children in the criminal justice system (2013-2019);

(g) Take measures to promote the protection of the rights of disabled persons in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;

(h) Maintain a focus on inclusive society-building and the development of civil society through implementation of the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012-2018);

(i) Continue close cooperation with non-governmental organizations in the development of human rights policies and decision-making processes and ensure the functioning of comprehensive consultation mechanisms, which can facilitate regular and open dialogue with civil society.

Conclusion

16. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, justice and equality are guiding principles of all policies implemented by the Government of Latvia. Having gone through a challenging transformation process and having achieved considerable progress, Latvia believes that as a member of the Human Rights Council it will have much to contribute to joint efforts in the global promotion and protection of human rights.